SLAVERY

INCONSISTENT

WITH

JUSTICE AND GOOD POLICY;

PROVED BY A SPEECH DELIVERED IN THE

CONVENTION,

HELD AT DANVILLE, KENTUCKY.

BY THE REV. DAVID RICE.

LET THE OPPRESSED GO FREE.——ISAIAH LVIII. 6.

PHILADELPHIA PRINTED, 1792.

LONDON REPRINTED, AND SOLD BY *M. GURNEY*, NO. 128, HOLBORN HILL.

M.DCC.XCIII.

(Price Two-pence.)

MR. CHAIRMAN,

I RISE, Sir, in ſupport of the motion now before you. But my reverence for this body, the novelty of my preſent ſituation, the great importance and difficulty of the ſubject, and the thought of being oppoſed by gentlemen of the greateſt abilities, have too ſenſible an impreſſion on my mind. But, Sir, I know ſo much of my natural timidity, which increaſes with my years, that I foreſaw this would be the caſe; I therefore prepared a ſpeech for the occaſion.

Sir, I have lived free, and in many reſpects happy for near ſixty years: but my happineſs has been greatly diminiſhed, for much of the time, by hearing a great part of the human ſpecies groaning under the galling yoke of bondage. In this time I loſt a venerable father, a tender mother, two affectionate ſiſters, and a beloved firſt-born ſon; but all theſe together have not coſt me half the anxiety as has been occaſioned by this wretched ſituation of my fellow-men, whom without a bluſh I call my brethren. When I conſider their deplorable ſtate, and who are the cauſe of their miſery; the load of miſery that lies on them, and the load of guilt on us for impoſing it on them; it fills my ſoul with anguiſh. I view their diſtreſſes, I read the anger of Heaven, I believe that if I ſhould not exert myſelf, when, and as far as, in my power, in order to relieve them, I ſhould be partaker of the guilt.

Sir, the queſtion is, Whether Slavery is conſiſtent with juſtice and good policy? But before this is anſwered, it may be neceſſary to enquire, what a ſlave is?

A ſlave is a human creature made by law the property of another human creature, and reduced by mere power to an abſolute unconditional ſubjection to his will.

This definition will be allowed to be juſt, with only this one exception, that the law does not leave the life and the limbs of the ſlave entirely in the maſter's power: and from it may be inferred ſeveral melancholy truths, which will include a ſufficient anſwer to the main queſtion.

In order to a right view of this ſubject, I would obſerve, that there are ſome caſes where a man may juſtly be made a ſlave by law. By vicious conduct he may forfeit his freedom; he may forfeit his life. Where this is the caſe, and the ſafety of the public may be ſecured

by reducing the offender to a ſtate of ſlavery, it will be right; it may be an act of kindneſs. In no other caſe, if my conceptions are juſt, can it be vindicated on principles of juſtice or humanity.

As creatures of GOD we are, with reſpect to liberty, all equal. If one has a right to live among his fellow creatures, and enjoy his freedom, ſo has another: if one has a right to enjoy that property he acquires by an honeſt induſtry, ſo has another. If I by force take that from another, which he has a juſt right to according to the law of nature, (which is a divine law) which he has never forfeited, and to which he has never relinquiſhed his claim, I am certainly guilty of injuſtice and robbery; and when the thing taken is the man's liberty, when it is himſelf, it is the greateſt injuſtice. I injure him much more, than if I robbed him of his property on the high-way. In this caſe, it does not belong to him to prove a negative, but to me to prove that ſuch forfeiture has been made; becauſe, if it has not, he is certainly ſtill the proprietor. All he has to do is to ſhew the inſufficiency of my proofs.

A ſlave claims his freedom; he pleads that he is a man, that he was by nature free, that he has not forfeited his freedom, nor relinquiſhed it. Now, unleſs his maſter can prove that he is not a man, that he was not born free, or that he has forfeited or relinquiſhed his freedom, he muſt be judged free; the juſtice of his claim muſt be acknowledged. His being long deprived of this right, by force or fraud, does not annihilate it; it remains; it is ſtill his right. When I rob a man of his property, I leave him his liberty, and a capacity of acquiring and poſſeſſing more property; but when I deprive him of his liberty, I alſo deprive him of this capacity; therefore I do him greater injury, when I deprive him of his liberty, than when I rob him of his property. It is in vain for me to plead, that I have the ſanction of law; for this makes the injury the greater: it arms the community againſt him, and makes his caſe deſperate.

If my definition of a ſlave is true, he is a rational creature reduced by the power of legiſlation to the ſtate of a brute, and thereby deprived of every privilege of humanity, except as above, that he may miniſter to the eaſe, luxury, luſt, pride, or avarice of another, no better than himſelf.

We only want a law enacted that no owner of a brute, nor other perſon, ſhould kill or diſmember it, and then in law the caſe of a ſlave and of a brute is in moſt reſpects parallel; and where they differ, the ſtate of the brute is to be preferred. The brute may ſteal or rob, to ſupply his hunger; the law does not condemn him to die for his offence, it only permits his death; but the ſlave, though in the moſt ſtarving condition, dares not do either, on penalty of death or ſome ſevere puniſhment.

Is

Is there any need of arguments to prove, that it is in a high degree unjuſt and cruel, to reduce one human creature to ſuch an abject wretched ſtate as this, that he may miniſter to the eaſe, luxury, or avarice of another? Has not that other the ſame right to have him reduced to this ſtate, that he may miniſter to his intereſt or pleaſure? On what is this right founded? Whence was it derived? Did it come from heaven, from earth, or from hell? Has the great King of heaven, the abſolute ſovereign diſpoſer of all men, given this extraordinary right to white men over black men? Where is the charter? In whoſe hands is it lodged? Let it be produced, and read, that we may know our privilege.

Thus reducing men is an indignity, a degradation to our own nature. Had we not loſt a true ſenſe of its worth and dignity, we ſhould bluſh to ſee it converted into brutes. We ſhould bluſh to ſee our houſes filled, or ſurrounded with cattle, in our own ſhapes. We ſhould look upon it to be a fouler, a blacker ſtain, than that with which the vertical ſuns have tinged the blood of Africa. When we plead for ſlavery, we plead for the diſgrace and ruin of our nature. If we are capable of it, we may ever after claim kindred with the brutes, and renounce our own ſuperior dignity.

From our definition it will appear, that a ſlave is a creature made after the image of GOD, and accountable to him for the maintenance of innocence and purity; but by law reduced to a liableneſs to be debauched by men, without any proſpect or hope of redreſs.

That a ſlave is made after the image of GOD, no Chriſtian will deny: that a ſlave is abſolutely ſubjected to be debauched by men, is ſo apparent from the nature of ſlavery, that it needs no proof. This is evidently the unhappy caſe of female ſlaves; a number of whom have been remarkable for their chaſtity and modeſty. If their maſter attempts their chaſtity, they dare neither reſiſt nor complain. If another man ſhould make the attempt, though reſiſtance may not be ſo dangerous, complaints are equally vain. They cannot be heard in their own defence; their teſtimony cannot be admitted. The injurious perſon has a right to be heard, may accuſe the innocent ſufferer of malicious ſlander, and have her ſeverely chaſtiſed.

A virtuous woman, and virtuous Africans no doubt there are, eſteems her chaſtity above every other thing: ſome have preferred it even to their lives. Then, forcibly to deprive her of this, is treating her with the greateſt injuſtice. Therefore, ſince law leaves the chaſtity of a female ſlave entirely in the power of her maſter, and greatly in the power of others, it permits this injuſtice; it provides no remedy; it refuſes to redreſs this inſufferable grievance; it denies even the ſmall privilege of complaining.

From our definition it will follow, that a ſlave is a free moral agent, legally deprived of free agency, and obliged to act according to the

will of another free agent of the ſame ſpecies: and yet he is accountable to his Creator for the uſe he makes of his own free agency.

When a man, though he can exiſt independent of another, cannot act independent of him, his agency muſt depend upon the will of that other; and therefore he is deprived of his own free agency: and yet, as a free agent, he is accountable to his Maker for all the deeds done in the body. This comes to paſs through a great omiſſion and inconſiſtency in the legiſlature. They ought farther to have enacted, in order to have been conſiſtent, that the ſlave ſhould not have been accountable for any of his actions; but that his maſter ſhould have anſwered for him in all things, here and hereafter.

That a ſlave has the capacities of a free moral agent, will be allowed by all. That he is, in many inſtances, deprived by law of the exerciſe of theſe powers, evidently appears from his ſituation. That he is accountable to his Maker for his conduct, will be allowed by thoſe, who do not believe that human legiſlatures are omnipotent, and can free men from this allegiance and ſubjection to the King of heaven.

The principles of conjugal love and fidelity in the breaſt of a virtuous pair, of natural affection in parents, and a ſenſe of duty in children, are inſcribed there by the finger of GOD; they are the laws of heaven: but an inſlaving law directly oppoſes them, and virtually forbids obedience. The relations of huſband and wife, of parent and child, are formed by divine authority, and founded on the laws of nature. But it is in the power of a cruel maſter, and often of a needy creditor, to break theſe tender connections, and for ever to ſeparate theſe deareſt relatives. This is ever done, in fact, at the call of intereſt, or of humour. The poor ſufferers may expoſtulate; they may plead; may plead with tears; their hearts may break; but all in vain. The laws of nature are violated, the tender ties are diſſolved, a final ſeparation takes place, and the duties of theſe relations can no longer be performed, nor their comforts enjoyed. Would theſe ſlaves perform the duties of huſbands and wives, parents and children; the law diſables them, it puts it altogether out of their power.

In theſe caſes, it is evident that the laws of nature, or the laws of man, are wrong; and which, none will be at a loſs to judge. The divine law ſays, Whom God hath joined together, let no man put aſunder: the law of man ſays, to the maſter of the ſlave, Though the divine law has joined them together, you may put them aſunder when you pleaſe. The divine law ſays, Train up your child in the way he ſhould go: the law of man ſays, You ſhall not train up your child, but as your maſter thinks proper. The divine law ſays, Honour your father and mother, and obey them in all things: but the law of man ſays, Honour and obey your maſter in all things, and your parents juſt as far as he ſhall direct you.

Should

Should a maſter command his ſlave to ſteal or rob, and he ſhould preſume to diſobey, he is liable to ſuffer every extremity of puniſhment, ſhort of death or amputation, from the hand of his maſter; at the ſame time he is liable to a puniſhment equally ſevere, if not death itſelf, ſhould he obey.

He is bound by law, if his maſter pleaſes, to do that for which the law condemns him to death.

Another conſequence of our definition is, That a ſlave, being a free moral agent, and an accountable creature, is a capable ſubject of religion and morality; but deprived by law of the means of inſtruction in the doctrines and duties of morality, any farther than his maſter pleaſes.

It is in the power of the maſter to deprive him of all the means of religious and moral inſtruction, either in private or in public. Some maſters have actually exerciſed this power, and reſtrained their ſlaves from the means of inſtruction, by the terror of the laſh. Slaves have not opportunity, at their own diſpoſal, for inſtructing converſation; it is put out of their power to learn to read; and their maſters may reſtrain them from other means of information. Maſters deſignedly keep their ſlaves in ignorance, leſt they ſhould become too knowing to anſwer their ſelfiſh purpoſes; and too wiſe to reſt eaſy in their degraded ſituation. In this caſe, the law operates ſo as to anſwer an end directly oppoſed to the proper end of all law. It is pointed againſt every thing dear to them; againſt the principal end of their exiſtence. It ſupports, in a land of religious liberty, the ſevereſt perſecutions; and may operate ſo as totally to rob multitudes of their religious privileges, and the rights of conſcience.

If my definition is juſt, a ſlave is one who is bound to ſpend his life in the ſervice of another, to whom he owes nothing, is under no obligation; who is not legally bound to find him victuals, clothes, medicine, or any other means of preſervation, ſupport, or comfort.

That a ſlave is bound to ſpend his life in the ſervice of his maſter, no one will diſpute; and that he is not indebted to his maſter, is under no obligations to him, is alſo evident. How can he poſſibly be indebted to him, who deprives him of liberty, property, and almoſt every thing dear to a human creature? And all he receives is the bare means of ſubſiſtence; and this not beſtowed, until he has earned it; and then not in proportion to his labour; nor out of regard to him, but for ſelfiſh purpoſes. This bare ſupport the maſter is not bound by law to give; but is left to be guided by his own intereſt or humour: and hence the poor ſlave often falls ſhort of what is neceſſary for the comfortable ſupport of the body.

The maſter is the enemy of the ſlave: he has made open war againſt him, and is daily carrying it on in unremitted efforts. Can any one then imagine, that the ſlave is indebted to his maſter, and bound to

ſerve him? Whence can the obligation ariſe? What is it founded upon? What is my duty to an enemy, that is carrying on war againſt me? I do not deny, but, in ſome circumſtances, it is the duty of the ſlave to ſerve; but it is a duty he owes himſelf, and not his maſter. The maſter may, and often does, inflict upon him all the ſeverity of puniſhment the human body is capable of bearing; and the law ſupports him in it. If he does but ſpare his life and his limbs, he dare not complain: none can hear and relieve him; he has no redreſs under heaven.

When we duly conſider all theſe things, it muſt appear unjuſt to the laſt degree, to force a fellow creature, who has never forfeited his freedom, into this wretched ſituation; and confine him and his poſterity in this bottomleſs gulph of wretchedneſs for ever. Where is the ſympathy, the tender feelings of humanity? Where is the heart that does not melt at this ſcene of woe? or that is not fired with indignation to ſee ſuch injuſtice and cruelty countenanced by civilized nations, and ſupported by the ſanction of law?

If ſlavery is not conſiſtent with juſtice, it muſt be inconſiſtent with good policy. For who would venture to aſſert, that it would be good policy for us to erect a public monument of our injuſtice, and that injuſtice is neceſſary for our proſperity and happineſs? That old proverb, Honeſty is the beſt policy, ought not to be deſpiſed for its age.

But the inconſiſtency of ſlavery with good policy will fully appear, if we conſider another conſequence of our definition, viz.

A ſlave is a member of civil ſociety, bound to obey the laws of the land; to which laws he never conſented; which partially and feebly protect his perſon; which allow him no property; from which he can receive no advantage; and which chiefly, as they relate to him, were made to puniſh him. He is therefore bound to ſubmit to a government, to which he owes no allegiance; from which he receives great injury; and to which he is under no obligations: and to perform ſervices to a ſociety, to which he owes nothing, and in whoſe proſperity he has no intereſt. That he is under this government, and forced to ſubmit to it, appears from his ſuffering the penalty of its laws. That he receives no benefit by the laws and government he is under, is evident from their depriving him of his liberty, and the means of happineſs. Though they protect his life and his limbs, they confine him in miſery, they will not ſuffer him to fly from it; the greateſt favours they afford him, chiefly ſerve to perpetuate his wretchedneſs.

He is, then, a member of ſociety, who is, properly ſpeaking, in a ſtate of war with his maſter, his civil rulers, and every free member of that ſociety. They are all his declared enemies, having, in him, made war upon almoſt every thing dear to a human creature. It is a

perpetual

perpetual war, with an avowed purpoſe of never making peace. This war, as it is unprovoked, is, on the part of the ſlave, properly defenſive. The injury done him is much greater than what is generally eſteemed a juſt ground of war between different nations; it is much greater than was the cauſe of war between us and Britain.

It cannot be conſiſtent with the principles of good policy to keep a numerous, a growing body of people among us, who add no ſtrength to us in time of war; who are under the ſtrongeſt temptations to join an enemy, as it is ſcarce poſſible they can loſe, and may be great gainers, by the event; who will count ſo many againſt us in an hour of danger and diſtreſs. A people whoſe intereſt it will be, whenever in their power, to ſubvert the government, and throw all into confuſion. Can it be ſafe? Can it be good policy? Can it be our intereſt, or the intereſt of poſterity, to nouriſh within our own bowels ſuch an injured, inveterate foe? A foe with whom we muſt be in a ſtate of eternal war? What havock would a handful of ſavages, in conjunction with this domeſtic enemy, make in our country! Eſpecially at a period when the main body of the inhabitants were ſoftened by luxury and eaſe, and quite unfitted for the hardſhips and dangers of war. Let us turn our eyes to the Weſt Indies; and there learn the melancholy effects of this wretched policy. We may there read them written with the blood of thouſands. There you may ſee the ſable, let me ſay, the brave ſons of Africa, engaged in a noble conflict with their inveterate foes. There you may ſee thouſands fired with a generous reſentment of the greateſt injuries, and bravely ſacrificing their lives on the altar of liberty.

In America, a ſlave is a ſtanding monument of the tyranny and inconſtency of human governments.

He is declared by the united voice of America, to be by nature free, and intitled to the privilege of acquiring and enjoying property: and yet by laws paſſed and inforced in theſe States, retained in ſlavery, and diſpoſſeſſed of all property and capacity of acquiring any. They have furniſhed a ſtriking inſtance of a people carrying on war in defence of principles, which they are actually and avowedly deſtroying by legal force; uſing one meaſure for themſelves, and another for their neighbours.

Every ſtate, in order to gain credit abroad, and confidence at home and to give proper energy to government, ſhould ſtudy to be conſiſtent; their conduct ſhould not diſagree with their avowed principles, nor be inconſiſtent with its ſeveral parts. Conſiſtent juſtice is the ſolid baſis on which the fabric of government will reſt ſecurely. Take this away, and the building totters, and is liable to fall before every blaſt. It is, I preſume, the avowed principle of each of us, that all men are by nature free, and are ſtill entitled to freedom, unleſs they have forfeited it. Now, after this is ſeen and acknowledged, to enact that men

ſhould be ſlaves, againſt whom we have no evidence that they have forfeited their right; what would it be, but evidently to fly in our own face; to contradict ourſelves; to proclaim before the world our own inconſiſtency; and warn all men to repoſe no confidence in us? After this, what credit can we ever expect? What confidence can we repoſe in each other? If we generally concur in this nefarious deed, we deſtroy mutual confidence, and break every link of the chain that ſhould bind us together.

Are we rulers? How can the people confide in us, after we have thus openly declared that we are void of truth and ſincerity; and, that we are capable of enſlaving mankind in direct contradiction to our own avowed principles? What confidence in legiſlators, who are capable of declaring their conſtituents all free men, in one breath; and, in the next, enacting them all ſlaves? In one breath, declaring that they have a right to acquire and poſſeſs property; and, in the next, that they ſhall neither acquire nor poſſeſs it, during their exiſtence here? Can I truſt my life, my liberty, my property in ſuch hands as theſe? Will the colour of my ſkin prove a ſufficient defence againſt their injuſtice and cruelty? Will the particular circumſtance of my anceſtors being born in Europe, and not in Africa, defend me? Will ſtraight hair defend me againſt the blow that falls ſo heavy on the woolly head?

If I am a diſhoneſt man, if gain is my God, and this may be acquired by ſuch an unrighteous law, I may rejoice to find it enacted: but I never can believe that the legiſlators were honeſt men; or repoſe the leaſt confidence in them, when their own intereſt would lead them to betray it. I never can truſt to the integrity of that judge, who can ſit upon the ſeat of juſtice, and paſs an unrighteous judgment, becauſe it is agreeable to law; when that law itſelf is contrary to the light and law of nature.

Where no confidence can be put in men of public truſt, the exerciſe of government muſt be very uneaſy, and the condition of the people extremely wretched. We may conclude, with the utmoſt certainty, that it would be bad policy to reduce matters to this unhappy ſituation.

Slavery naturally tends to ſap the foundations of moral, and conſequently of political virtue; and virtue is abſolutely neceſſary for the happineſs and proſperity of a free people. Slavery produces idleneſs; and idleneſs is the nurſe of vice. A vicious commonwealth is a building erected on quick-ſand, the inhabitants of which can never abide in ſafety.

Young gentlemen, who ought to be the honour and ſupport of the ſtate, when they have in proſpect an independant fortune conſiſting in land and ſlaves, which they can eaſily devolve on a faithful overſeer or ſteward, become the moſt uſeleſs and inſignificant members of ſociety.

There

There is no confining them to uſeful ſtudies, or any buſineſs that will fit them for ſerving the public. They are employed in ſcenes of pleaſure and diſſipation. They corrupt each other; they corrupt the morals of all around them: while their ſlaves, even in time of peace, are far from being equally uſeful to ſociety with the ſame number of free men; and, in time of war, are to be conſidered as an enemy lodged within our walls. I ſaid, they are uſeleſs inſignificant members of ſociety. I ſhould have ſaid more; I ſhould have ſaid, they are intolerable nuiſances, pernicious peſts of ſociety. I mean not to reproach men of fortune; I mean only to point out the natural tendency of ſlavery, in order to ſhew, how inconſiſtent it is with good policy.

The proſperity of a country depends upon the induſtry of its inhabitants. Idleneſs will produce poverty; and when ſlavery becomes common, induſtry ſinks into diſgrace. To labour, is to *ſlave*; to work, is *to work like a Negroe*: and this is diſgraceful. It levels us with the meaneſt of the ſpecies; it ſits hard upon the mind; it cannot be patiently borne. Youth are hereby tempted to idleneſs, and drawn into other vices: they ſee no other way to keep their credit, and acquire ſome little importance. This renders them, like thoſe they ape, nuiſances of ſociety. It frequently tempts them to gaming, theft, robbery, or forgery; for which they often end their days in diſgrace on the gallows. Since every ſtate muſt be ſupported by induſtry, it is exceedingly unwiſe to admit what will inevitably ſink it into diſgrace: and that this is the tendency of ſlavery, is known from matter of fact.

Slavery naturally tends to deſtroy all ſenſe of juſtice and equity. It puffs up the mind with pride; teaches youth a habit of looking upon their fellow creatures with contempt, eſteeming them as dogs or devils, and imagining themſelves beings of ſuperior dignity and importance, to whom all are indebted. This baniſhes the idea, and unqualifies the mind for the practice, of common juſtice. If I have, all my days, been accuſtomed to live at the expence of a black man, without making him any compenſation, or conſidering myſelf at all in his debt, I cannot think it any great crime to live at the expence of a white man. If I can rob a black man without guilt, I ſhall contract no great guilt by robbing a white man. If I have been long accuſtomed to think a black man was made for me, I may eaſily take it into my head to think ſo of a white man. If I have no ſenſe of obligation to do juſtice to a black man, I can have little to do juſtice to a white man. In this caſe, the tinge of our ſkins, or the place of our nativity, can make but little difference. If I am in principle a friend to ſlavery, I cannot, to be conſiſtent, think it any crime to rob my country of its property and freedom, whenever my intereſt calls, and I find it in my power. If I make any difference here, it muſt be owing to a vicious education, the force of prejudice, or pride of

heart. If in principle a friend to ſlavery, I cannot feel myſelf obliged to pay the debt due to my neighbour. If I can wrong him of all his poſſeſſions, and avoid the law, all is well.

The deſtruction of chaſtity has a natural tendency to introduce a number of vices, that are very pernicious to the intereſt of a commonwealth; and ſlavery much conduces to deſtroy chaſtity, as it puts ſo great a number of females entirely in the power of the other ſex; againſt whom they dare not complain, on peril of the laſh; and many of whom they dare not reſiſt. This vice, this bane of ſociety, has already become ſo common, that it is ſcarely eſteemed a diſgrace, in the one ſex, and that the one that is generally the moſt criminal. Let it become as little diſgraceful in the other, and there is an end to domeſtic tranquillity, an end to the public proſperity.

It is neceſſary to our national proſperity, that the eſtates of the inhabitants of the country be greatly productive. But perhaps no eſtates, poſſeſſed in any part of the world, are leſs productive than thoſe which conſiſt in great numbers of ſlaves. In ſuch eſtates there will be old and decrepit men and women, breeding women, and little children: all muſt be maintained. They labour only from ſervile principles, and therefore not to equal advantage with free men. They will labour as little, they will take as little care, as they poſſibly can. When their maintenance is deducted from the fruit of their labour, only a ſmall pittance remains for the owner. Hence many, who are proud of their eſtates, and envied for their wealth, are living in poverty, and immerſed in debt. Here are large eſtates to be taxed; but ſmall incomes to pay the taxes. This, while it gives us weight in the ſcale of the Union, will make us groan under the burden of our own importance.

Put all the above conſiderations together, and it evidently appears, that ſlavery is neither conſiſtent with juſtice nor good policy. Theſe are conſiderations, one would think, ſufficient to ſilence every objection; but I foreſee, notwithſtanding, that a number will be made, ſome of which have a formidable appearance.

It will be ſaid, Negroes were made ſlaves by law, they were converted into property by an act of the legiſlature; and under the ſanction of that law I purchaſed them; they therefore became my property, I have a legal claim to them. To repeal this law, to annihilate ſlavery, would be violently to deſtroy what I legally purchaſed with my money, or inherit from my father. It would be equally unjuſt with diſpoſſeſſing me of my horſes, cattle, or any other ſpecies of property. To diſpoſſeſs me of their offspring would be injuſtice equal to diſpoſſeſſing me of the annual profits of my eſtate. This is an important objection, and it calls for a ſerious anſwer.

The matter ſeems to ſtand thus: Many years ago, men, being deprived of their natural right to freedom, and made ſlaves, were

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by law converted into property. This law, it is true, was wrong, it eſtabliſhed iniquity; it was againſt the law of humanity, common ſenſe, reaſon, and conſcience. It was, however, a law; and under the ſanction of it, a number of men, regardleſs of its iniquity, purchaſed theſe ſlaves, and made their fellow men their property.

The queſtion is concerning the liberty of a man. The man himſelf claims it as his own property. He pleads that it was originally his own, that he has never forfeited, nor alienated it; and therefore by the common laws of juſtice and humanity, it is ſtill his own. The purchaſer of the ſlave claims the ſame property. He pleads that he purchaſed it under the ſanction of a law, enacted by the legiſlature; and therefore it became his. Now the queſtion is, who has the beſt claim? Did the property in queſtion belong to the legiſlature? Was it veſted in them? If legiſlatures are poſſeſſed of ſuch property as this, may another never exiſt! No individual of their conſtituents could claim it as his own inherent right; it was not in them collectively; and therefore they could not convey it to their repreſentatives. Was it ever known that a people choſe repreſentatives to create and transfer this kind of property? The legiſlature were not, they could not be poſſeſſed of it; and therefore could not transfer it to another; they could not give what they themſelves had not. Now, does this property belong to him, who received it from a legiſlature that had it not to give, and by a law they had no right to enact? or to the original owner, who has never forfeited, nor alienated his right? If a law ſhould paſs for ſelling an innocent man's head, and I ſhould purchaſe it; have I, in conſequence of this law and this purchaſe, a better claim to this man's head than he has himſelf?

To call our fellow men, who have not forfeited, nor voluntarily reſigned their liberty, our property, is a groſs abſurdity, a contradiction to common ſenſe, and an indignity to human nature. The owners of ſuch ſlaves then are the licenced robbers, and not the juſt proprietors, of what they claim. Freeing them is not depriving them of property, but reſtoring it to the right owner; it is ſuffering the unlawful captive to eſcape. It is not wronging the maſter, but doing juſtice to the ſlave, reſtoring him to himſelf. The maſter, it is true, is wronged; he may ſuffer and that greatly: but this is his own fault, and the fault of the enſlaving law; and not of the law that does juſtice to the oppreſſed.

You ſay, a law of emancipation would be unjuſt, becauſe it would deprive men of their property: but is there no injuſtice on the other ſide? Is nobody intitled to juſtice, but ſlave-holders? Let us conſider the injuſtice on both ſides; and weigh them in an even balance. On the one hand, we ſee a man deprived of all property, of all capacity to poſſeſs property, of his own free agency, of the means of inſtruction, of his wife, of his children, of almoſt every thing dear to him: on the other,

other, a man deprived of eighty or an hundred pounds. Shall we heſitate a moment to determine, who is the greateſt ſufferer, and who is treated with the greateſt injuſtice? The matter appears quite glaring, when we conſider, that neither this man, nor his parents, had ſinned, that he was born to theſe ſufferings; but the other ſuffers altogether for his own ſin, and that of his predeceſſors. Such a law would only take away property, that is its *own* property, and not ours; property that has the ſame right to poſſeſs us, as its property, as we have to poſſeſs it; property that has the ſame right to convert our children into dogs, and calves, and colts, as we have to convert theirs into theſe beaſts; property that may transfer our children to ſtrangers, by the ſame right that we transfer theirs.

Human legiſlatures ſhould remember, that they act in ſubordination to the great Ruler of the univerſe, have no right to take the government out of his hand, nor to enact laws contrary to his; that if they ſhould preſume to attempt it, they cannot make that right, which he has made wrong; they cannot diſſolve the allegiance of his ſubjects, and transfer it to themſelves, and thereby free the people from their obligations to obey the laws of nature. The people ſhould know, that legiſlatures have not this power; and that a thouſand laws can never make that innocent, which the divine law has made criminal; or give them a right to that, which the divine law forbids them to claim.

But to the above reply it may be farther objected, That neither we, nor the legiſlature, enſlaved the Africans; but they enſlaved one another, and we only purchaſed thoſe whom they had made priſoners of war, and reduced to ſlavery.

Making priſoners of war ſlaves, though practiſed by the Romans and other ancient nations, and though ſtill practiſed by ſome barbarous tribes, can by no means be juſtified: it is unreaſonable and cruel. Whatever may be ſaid of the chief authors and promoters of an unjuſt war, the common ſoldier, who is under command and obliged to obey, and, as is often the caſe, deprived of the means of information as to the grounds of the war, certainly cannot be thought guilty of a crime ſo heinous, that for it himſelf and poſterity deſerve the dreadful puniſhment of perpetual ſervitude. It is a cruelty that the preſent practice of all civilized nations bears teſtimony againſt. Allow then the matter objected to be true, and it will not juſtify our practice of enſlaving the Africans. But the matter contained in the objection is only true in part. The hiſtory of the ſlave trade is too tragical to be read without a bleeding heart and weeping eyes.

A few of theſe unhappy Africans, and comparatively very few, are criminals, whoſe ſervitude is inflicted as a puniſhmeut for their crimes. The main body are innocent, unſuſpecting creatures, free, living in peace, doing nothing to forfeit the common privileges of men.

men. They are ſtolen, or violently borne away by armed force, from their country, their parents, and all their tender connections; treated with an indignity and indecency ſhameful to mention, and a cruelty ſhocking to all the tender feelings of humanity; and they and their poſterity forced into a ſtate of ſervitude and wretchedneſs for ever. It is true, they are commonly taken priſoners by Africans; but it is the encouragement given by Europeans that tempts the Africans to carry on theſe unprovoked wars. They furniſh them with the means, and hold out to them a reward for their plunder. If the Africans are thieves, the Europeans ſtand ready to receive the ſtolen goods; if the former are robbers, the latter furniſh them with arms, and purchaſe the ſpoil. In this caſe, who is the moſt criminal, the civilized European, or the untutored African? The European merchants know, that they themſelves are the great encouragers of theſe wars; as they are the principal gainers by the event. They furniſh the ſinews, add the ſtrength, and receive the gain. They know, that they purchaſe theſe ſlaves of thoſe who have no juſt pretence to claim them as theirs. The African can give the European no better claim than he himſelf has; the European merchant can give us no better claim than is veſted in him; and that is one founded only in violence or fraud.

In confirmation of this account might be produced many ſubſtantial vouchers, and ſome who had ſpent much time in this nefarious traffic. But ſuch as are accuſtomed to liſten to the melancholy tales of theſe unfortunate Africans, cannot want ſufficient evidence. Thoſe who have ſeen multitudes of poor innocent children driven to market, and ſold like beaſts, have it demonſtrated before their eyes.

It will be farther objected, That in our ſituation, the abolition of ſlavery would be bad policy; becauſe it would diſcourage emigrants from the Eaſtward, prevent the population of this country, and conſequently its opulence and ſtrength.

I doubt not but it would prevent a number of ſlave-holders from coming into this country, with their ſlaves. But this would be far, very far from being an evil. It would be a moſt deſirable event: it would be keeping out a great and intolerable nuiſance, the bane of every country where it is admitted, the cauſe of ignorance and vice, and of national poverty and weakneſs. On the other hand, if I miſtake not, it would invite five uſeful citizens into our ſtate, where it would keep out one ſlave-holder: and who would not rejoice in the happy exchange? Turn your eyes to the Eaſtward: behold numerous ſhoals of ſlaves, moving towards us, in thick ſucceſſion. Look to the Weſtward: ſee a large, vacant, fertile country, lying near, eaſy of acceſs, an aſylum for the miſerable, a land of liberty. A man, who has no ſlaves, cannot live eaſy and contented in the midſt of thoſe who poſſeſs them in numbers. He is treated with neglect, and

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often with contempt: he is not a companion for his free neighbours, but only for their more reputable ſlaves: his children are looked upon and treated by theirs as underlings. Theſe things are not eaſy to bear; they render his mind uneaſy, and his ſituation unpleaſant. When he ſees an open way to remove from this ſituation, and finds it may be done conſiſtent with his intereſt, he will not long abide in it. When he removes, his place is filled up with ſlaves. Thus this country will ſpew out its white inhabitants; and be peopled with ſlave-holders, their ſlaves, and a few, in the higheſt poſts of a poor free man, I mean that of an overſeer. When we attentively view and conſider our ſituation, with relation to the Eaſt and the Weſt, we may be aſſured that this event will ſoon take place; that the progreſs towards it will be exceedingly rapid, and greatly accelerated by the fertility of our ſoil.

That this, on ſuppoſition ſlavery ſhould continue, would ſoon be the ſtate of population in this country, is not only poſſible, but very probable; not only probable, but morally certain. But is this a deſirable ſituation? Would it be ſafe, and comfortable? Would it be ſo, even to maſters themſelves? I preſume not: eſpecially when I conſider, that their near neighbours, beyond the Ohio, could not, conſiſtent with their principles, aſſiſt them, in caſe of a domeſtic inſurrection. Suppoſe our inhabitants ſhould be fewer; they would be uſeful citizens, who could repoſe a mutual confidence in each other. To increaſe the inhabitants of this ſtate by multiplying an enemy within our own bowels; an enemy, with whom we are in a ſtate of perpetual war, and can never make peace, is very far from being an object of deſire: eſpecially if we conſider, that a belief of the iniquity of this ſervitude is faſt gaining ground. Should this ſentiment obtain the general belief, what might be the event? What would be the ſituation of a certain deſcription of men? What the condition of this country?

Another frightful objection to my doctrine is, That ſhould we ſet our ſlaves free, it would lay a foundation for intermarriages, and an unnatural mixture of blood, and our poſterity at length would all be Mulattoes.

This effect, I grant, it would produce. I alſo grant, that this appears very unnatural to perſons labouring under our prejudices of education. I acknowledge my own pride remonſtrates againſt it; but it does not influence my judgment, nor affect my conſcience.

To plead this, as a reaſon for the continuation of ſlavery, is to plead the fear that we ſhould diſgrace ourſelves, as a reaſon why we ſhould do injuſtice to others: to plead that we may continue in guilt, for fear the features and complexion of our poſterity ſhould be ſpoiled. We ſhould recollect, that it is too late to prevent this great imaginary evil; the matter is already gone beyond recovery: for it may

be proved with mathematical certainty, that, if things go on in the preſent channel, the future inhabitants of America will inevitably be Mulattoes.

How often have men children by their own ſlaves, by their fathers' ſlaves, or the ſlaves of their neighbours? How faſt is the number of Mulattoes increaſing in every part of the land? Viſit the little towns and villages to the Eaſtward; viſit the ſeats of gentlemen, who abound in ſlaves; and ſee how they ſwarm on every hand! All the children of Mulattoes will be Mulattoes, and the whites are daily adding to the number; which will continually increaſe the proportion of Mulattoes. Thus this evil is coming upon us in a way much more diſgraceful, and unnatural, than intermarriages. Fathers will have their own children for ſlaves, and leave them as an inheritance to their children. Men will poſſeſs their brothers and ſiſters as their property, leave them to their heirs, or ſell them to ſtrangers. Youth will have their grey headed uncles and aunts for ſlaves, call them their property, and transfer them to others. Men will humble their own ſiſters, or even their aunts, to gratify their luſt. An hard-hearted maſter will not know, whether he has a blood relation, a brother or a ſiſter, an uncle or an aunt, or a ſtranger of Africa, under his ſcourging hand. This is not the work of imagination; it has been frequently realized.

The worſt that can be made of this objection, ugly as it is, is, that it would be haſtening an evil in an honeſt way, which we are already bringing on ourſelves in a way that is abſolutely diſhoneſt, perfectly ſhameful, and extremely criminal. This objection then can have no weight with a reaſonable man, who can diveſt himſelf of his prejudices and his pride, and view the matter as really circumſtanced. The evil is inevitable: but as it is a prejudice of education, it would be an evil only in its approach; as it drew near, it would decreaſe; when fully come, it would ceaſe to exiſt.

Another objection to my doctrine, and that eſteemed by ſome the moſt formidable, ſtill lies before me; an objection taken from the ſacred ſcriptures. There will be produced on the occaſion, the example of faithful Abraham, recorded in Gen. xvii. and the law of Moſes, recorded in Lev. xxv. The injunctions laid upon ſervants in the goſpel, particularly by the Apoſtle Paul, will alſo be introduced here. Theſe will all be directed, as formidable artillery, againſt me, and in defence of abſolute ſlavery.

From the paſſage in Geneſis, it is argued, by the advocates for perpetual ſlavery, That ſince Abraham had ſervants born in his houſe and bought with money, they muſt have been ſervants for life, like our Negroes: and hence they conclude, that it is lawful for us to purchaſe heathen ſervants, and if they have children born in our houſes, to make them ſervants alſo. From the law of Moſes it is argued,

argued, that the Iſraelites were authoriſed to leave the children of their ſervants, as an inheritance to their own children for ever: and hence it is inferred, that we may leave the children of our ſlaves as an inheritance to our children for ever. If this was immoral in itſelf, a juſt God would never have given it the ſanction of his authority; and, if lawful in itſelf, we may ſafely follow the example of Abraham, and act according to the law of Moſes.

None, I hope, will make this objection, but thoſe who believe theſe writings to be of divine authority; for if they are not ſo, it is little to the purpoſe to introduce them here. If you grant them to be of divine authority, you will alſo grant, that they are conſiſtent with themſelves, and that one paſſage may help to explain another. Grant me this, and then I reply to the objection.

In the 12th verſe of the 17th of Geneſis, we find that Abraham was commanded to circumciſe all that were born in his houſe, or bought with money. We find in the ſequel of the chapter, that he obeyed this command without delay; and actually circumciſed every male in his family, who came under this deſcription. This law of circumciſion continued in force; it was not repealed, but confirmed by the law of Moſes.

Now, to the circumciſed were committed the oracles of God; and circumciſion was a token of that covenant by which, among other things, the land of Canaan, and the various privileges in it, were promiſed to Abraham, and his ſeed; to all that were included in that covenant. All were included, to whom circumciſion, which was the token of the covenant, was adminiſtered, agreeably to God's command. By divine appointment, not only Abraham and his natural ſeed, but he that was bought with money of any ſtranger that was not of his ſeed, was circumciſed. Since the ſeed of the ſtranger received the token of this covenant, we muſt believe, that he was included, and intereſted in it; that the benefits promiſed were to be conferred on him. Theſe perſons bought with money were no longer looked upon as uncircumciſed and unclean, as aliens and ſtrangers; but were incorporated into the church and nation of the Iſraelites; and became one people with them, became God's covenant people. Whence it appears, that ſuitable proviſion was made by the divine law that they ſhould be properly educated, made free, and enjoy all the common privileges of citizens. It was by the divine law enjoined upon the Iſraelites, thus to circumciſe all the males born in their houſes; then, if the purchaſed ſervants in queſtion had any children, their maſters were bound by law to incorporate them into their church and nation. Theſe children, then, were the ſervants of the Lord, in the ſame ſenſe as the natural deſcendants of Abraham were; and therefore, according to the law, Lev. xxv. 42, 55. they could not be made ſlaves. The paſſages of ſcripture under conſideration

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were ſo far from authoriſing the Iſraelites to make ſlaves of their ſervants' children, that they evidently forbid it; and therefore are ſo far from proving the lawfulneſs of our enſlaving the children of the Africans, that they clearly condemn the practice as criminal.

Theſe paſſages of ſacred writ have been wickedly preſſed into the ſervice of Mammon, perhaps more frequently than any others: but does it not now appear, that theſe weighty pieces of artillery may be fairly wreſted from the enemy, and turned upon the hoſts of the Mammonites, with very good effect?

The advocates for ſlavery ſhould have obſerved, that in the law of Moſes referred to, there is not the leaſt mention made of the children of theſe ſervants; it is not ſaid that they ſhould be ſervants; or any thing about them. No doubt, ſome of them had children, but it was unneceſſary to mention them; becauſe they were already provided for, by the law of circumciſion.

To extend the law of Moſes to the children of theſe ſervants, is arbitrary and preſumptuous; it is making them include much more than is expreſſed or neceſſarily implied in the text. It cannot be neceſſarily implied in the expreſſion, *They ſhall be your bondmen for ever*; becauſe the word *for ever* is evidently limited by the nature of the ſubject; and nothing appears, by which it can be more properly limited, than the life of the ſervants purchaſed. The ſenſe then is ſimply this, they ſhall ſerve you and your children as long as they live.

We cannot certainly determine how theſe perſons were made ſervants at firſt; nor is it neceſſary we ſhould. Whether they were perſons who had forfeited their liberty by capital crimes; or whether they had involved themſelves in debt by folly and extravagance, and ſubmitted to ſerve during their lives, in order to avoid a greater calamity; or whether they were driven to that neceſſity in their younger days, for want of friends to take care of them, we cannot tell. This however we may be ſure of, that the Iſraelites were not ſent by a divine law to nations three thouſand miles diſtant, who were neither doing, nor meditating any thing againſt them, and with whom they had nothing to do; in order to captivate them by fraud or force, tear them away from their country and all their tender connections, bind them in chains, crowd them into ſhips, and there murder them by thouſands, with the want of air and exerciſe; and then condemn the ſurvivors and their poſterity to ſlavery for ever.

But it is further objected, That the Apoſtle adviſes ſervants to be contented with their ſtate of ſervitude, and obedient to their maſters; and, though he charges their maſters to uſe them well, he nowhere commands them to ſet them free.

In order rightly to underſtand this matter, we ſhould recollect the ſituation of Chriſtians at this time. They were under the Roman

yoke,

yoke, the government of the heathen; who were watching every opportunity of charging them with deſigns againſt their government, in order to juſtify their bloody perſecutions. In ſuch circumſtances, for the Apoſtle to have proclaimed liberty to the ſlaves, would probably have expoſed many of them to certain deſtruction, brought ruin on the Chriſtian cauſe, and that without the proſpect of freeing one ſingle man; which would have been the height of madneſs and cruelty. It was wiſe, it was humane in him, not to drop a ſingle hint on this ſubject, farther than ſaying, *If thou mayeſt be made free, uſe it rather.*

Though the Apoſtles acted with this prudent reſerve, the unreaſonableneſs of perpetual unconditional ſlavery may eaſily be inferred from the righteous and benevolent doctrines and duties taught in the New Teſtament. It is quite evident, that ſlavery is contrary to the ſpirit and genius of the Chriſtian religion. It is contrary to that excellent precept laid down by the divine Author of the Chriſtian inſtitution, viz. *Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them.* A precept ſo finely calculated to teach the duties of juſtice, to inforce their obligation, and induce the mind to obedience, that nothing can excel it. No man, when he views the hardſhips, the ſufferings, the exceſſive labours, the unreaſonable chaſtiſements, the ſeparations between loving huſbands and wives, between affectionate parents and children, can ſay, "Were I in their place, I ſhould be contented. I ſo far approve this uſage, as to believe the law that ſubjects me to it is perfectly right; that I and my poſterity ſhould be denied the protection of law, and by it be expoſed to ſuffer all theſe calamities; though I never forfeited my freedom, nor merited ſuch treatment, more than others." No; there is an honeſt SOMETHING in our breaſts, that bears teſtimony againſt this, as unreaſonable and wicked. I found it in my own breaſt near forty years ago; and through all the changes of time, the influence of cuſtom, the arts of ſophiſtry, and the faſcinations of intereſt, it remains there ſtill. I believe it is a law of my nature; a law of more ancient date than any act of parliament; and which no human legiſlature can ever repeal. It is a law inſcribed on every human heart; and may there be ſeen in legible characters, unleſs it is blotted by vice, or the eye of the mind blinded by intereſt. Should I do any thing to countenance this evil, I ſhould fight againſt my own heart: ſhould I not uſe my influence to annihilate it, my own conſcience would condemn me.

It may be farther objected, This ſlavery, it is true, is a great evil; but ſtill greater evils would follow emancipation. Men who have laid out their money in the purchaſe of ſlaves, and now have little other property, would certainly be great ſufferers. Beſides, the ſlaves themſelves are unacquainted with the arts of life; being uſed to act only under the direction of others, they have never acquired

quired the habits of induſtry; have not that ſenſe of property and ſpirit of emulation neceſſary to make them uſeful citizens. Many have been ſo long accuſtomed to the meaner vices, habituated to lying, pilfering and ſtealing, that when pinched with want, they would commit theſe crimes, become peſts to ſociety, or end their days on the gallows. Here are evils on both hands, and of two evils, we ſhould take the leaſt.

This is a good rule, when applied to natural evils; but with moral evils it has nothing to do; for of theſe we muſt chuſe neither. Of two evils, the one natural, the other moral, we muſt always chuſe the natural evil; for moral evil, which is the ſame thing as ſin, can never be a proper object of choice. Enſlaving our fellow creatures is a moral evil; ſome of its effects are moral, and ſome natural. There is no way ſo proper to avoid the moral evil effects, as by avoiding the cauſe. The natural evil effects of emancipation can never be a balance for the moral evils of ſlavery, or a reaſon why we ſhould prefer the latter to the former.

Here we ſhould conſider, on whom theſe evils are to be charged; and we ſhall find they lie at our own doors, they are chargeable on us. We have brought one generation into this wretched ſtate; and ſhall we therefore doom all the generations of their poſterity to it? Do we find by experience, that this ſtate of ſlavery corrupts and ruins human nature? and ſhall we perſiſt in corrupting and ruining it, in order to avoid the natural evils we have already produced? Do we find, as the ancient Poet ſaid, that the day we deprive a man of freedom, we take away half his ſoul? and ſhall we continue to maim ſouls, becauſe a maimed ſoul is unfit for ſociety? Strange reaſoning indeed! An aſtoniſhing conſequence! I ſhould have looked for a concluſion quite oppoſite to this, viz. That we ſhould be ſenſible of the evil of our conduct, and perſiſt in it no longer. To me this appears a very powerful argument againſt ſlavery, and a convincing proof of its iniquity. It is ruining GOD'S creatures whom he has made free moral agents, and accountable beings; creatures who ſtill belong to him, and are not left to us to ruin at our pleaſure.

However, the objection is weighty, and the difficulty ſuggeſted great. But I do not think, that it is ſuch as ought to deter us from our duty, or tempt us to continue a practice, ſo inconſiſtent with juſtice and found policy. Therefore I give it as my opinion, that the firſt thing to be done is, *To reſolve* UNCONDITIONALLY *to put an end to ſlavery in this ſtate.* This, I conceive, properly belongs to the Convention; which they can eaſily effect, by working the principle into the conſtitution they are to frame.

If there is not in government ſome fixed principles ſuperior to all law, and above the power of legiſlators, there can be no ſtability, or conſiſtency in it: it will be continually fluctuating with the opinions, humour,

humours, paſſions, prejudices, or intereſts, of different legiſlative bodies. Liberty is an inherent right of man, of every man; the exiſtence of which ought not to depend upon the mutability of legiſlation; but ſhould be wrought into the very conſtitution of our government, and be made eſſential to it.

The deviſing ways and means to accompliſh this end, ſo as ſhall beſt conſiſt with the public intereſt, will be the duty of our future legiſlature.

This evil is a tree that has been long planted, it has been growing many years, it has taken deep root, its trunk is large, and its branches extended wide: ſhould it be cut down ſuddenly, it might cruſh all that grow near it; ſhould it be violently eradicated, it might tear up the ground in which it grows, and produce fatal effects. It is true, the ſlaves have a juſt claim to be freed inſtantly: but by our bad conduct, we have rendered them incapable of enjoying, and properly uſing this their birth-right; and therefore a gradual emancipation only can be adviſeable. The limbs of this tree muſt be lopped off by little and little, the trunk gradually hewn down, and the ſtump and roots left to rot in the ground.

The legiſlature, if they judged it expedient, would prevent the importation of any more ſlaves; they would enact that all born after ſuch a date ſhould be born free; be qualified by proper education to make uſeful citizens; and be actually freed at a proper age.

It is no ſmall recommendation of this plan, that it ſo nearly coincides with the Moſaic law, in this caſe provided; to which, even ſuppoſe it a human inſtitution, great reſpect is due for its antiquity, its juſtice and humanity.

It would, I think, avoid in a great meaſure, all the evils mentioned in the objection. All that was the maſter's own, at the time fixed upon in the act, would be ſtill his own: All that ſhould deſcend from them would be his own until he was paid for their education. All he would loſe would be the proſpect of his children being enriched at the expence of thoſe who are unborn. Would any man murmur at having this proſpect, which was given him by an iniquitous law, and cannot be enjoyed without guilt, cut off by a righteous law, that frees from oppreſſion future generations?

Is there any ſuch man to be found? Let us ſtop a moment to hear his complaint. "I have long lived happy by oppreſſion. I wanted to leave this privilege as an inheritance to my children. I had a delightſome proſpect of their living alſo in eaſe and ſplendour at the expence of others. This iniquity was once ſanctified by a law, of which I hoped my children's children would have enjoyed the ſweets; but now this hard-hearted, this cruel Convention has cut off this pleaſing proſpect.

"They

"They will not ſuffer my children to live in eaſe and luxury, at the expence of poor Africans. They have reſolved, and alas! the reſolution muſt ſtand for ever, that black men in the next generation ſhall enjoy the fruit of their own labour, as well as white men; and be happy according to the merit of their own conduct. If juſtice be done to the offspring of Negroes, mine are eternally ruined. If my children cannot, as I have done, live in injuſtice and cruelty, they are injured, they are robbed, they are undone. What,—muſt young maſter ſaddle his own horſe?—Muſt pretty little miſs ſweep the houſe and waſh the diſhes?—and theſe black devils be free!——No heart can bear it!—Such is the difference between us and them, that it is a greater injury to us to be deprived of their labour, than it is to them to be deprived of their liberty and every thing elſe. This wicked Convention will have to anſwer another day, for the great injury they have done us, in doing juſtice to them."

Emancipation on ſome ſuch plan as above hinted, would probably, in many inſtances, be a real advantage to children in point of wealth. Parents would educate them in ſuch a manner, and place them in ſuch circumſtances, as would be more to their intereſt, than poſſeſſing ſuch unproductive eſtates as ſlaves are found to be.

The children would imbibe a noble independent ſpirit, learn a habit of managing buſineſs and helping themſelves. They would learn to ſcorn the mean and beggarly way of living at the expence of others, living in ſplendor on plunder of the innocent. Where eſtates were wiſely managed, children would not find their fortunes diminiſhed. They would not be mocked with nominal, but poſſeſs real wealth; wealth that would not merely feed their vanity, but fill their coffers.

The children of the ſlaves, inſtead of being ruined for want of education, would be ſo brought up as to become uſeful citizens. The country would improve by their induſtry; manufactures would flouriſh; and, in time of war, they would not be the terror, but the ſtrength and defence of the ſtate.

It may be farther objected, That to attempt, even in this gradual way, the annihilation of ſlavery in this country, where ſo many are deeply intereſted, might ſo ſenſibly touch the intereſt of ſome unreaſonable men, as probably to ſtir up great confuſion, and endanger the tranquillity of our infant ſtate.

Though I doubt not but ſome men of narrow minds, under the influence of prejudice or covetouſneſs, might be made uneaſy and diſpoſed to clamour; yet I apprehend but little danger of any ill effects. The meaſure would be ſo agreeable to the honeſt dictates of conſcience, the growing ſentiments of the country, and of many even of the ſlave-holders themſelves, that any oppoſition they might make would not be ſupported; and they would be too wiſe to hazard the haſtening an event they ſo much dread.

If

If the growing opinion of the unlawfulneſs of ſlavery ſhould continue to grow, holding men in that ſtate will ſoon be impracticable; there will be no cauſe exiſting ſufficient to produce the effect. When this ſhall happen a certain event may ſuddenly take place, the conſequences of which may be very diſagreeable. This I take to be the proper time to prevent this evil. We may now do it in a peaceable manner, without going a ſtep out of the way of our duty, and without hazarding what might be attended with tenfold more confuſion and danger.

The ſlavery of the Negroes began in iniquity; a curſe has attended it, and a curſe will follow it. National vices will be puniſhed with national calamities. Let us avoid theſe vices, that we may avoid the puniſhment which they deſerve; and endeavour ſo to act, as to ſecure the approbation and ſmiles of Heaven.

Holding men in ſlavery is the national vice of Virginia; and, while a part of that ſtate, we were partakers of the guilt. As a ſeparate ſtate, we are juſt now come to the birth; and it depends upon our free choice, whether we ſhall be born in this ſin, or innocent of it. We now have it in our power to adopt it as our national crime; or to bear a national teſtimony againſt it. I hope the latter will be our choice; that we ſhall waſh our hands of this guilt, and not leave it in the power of a future legiſlature, ever more to ſtain our reputation or our conſcience with it.

THE END.

Of M. GURNEY *may alſo be had,*

Moſt of the PAMPHLETS lately publiſhed on the foregoing SUBJECT.